

Farmington Observer OPINION

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33411 GRAND RIVER, FARMINGTON, MICHIGAN 48335

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Looking ahead Our hopes for the New Year

With the start of the New Year comes the natural need to make resolutions, to establish paths for the future and to set goals.

The Farmington Observer is no different in that need as the staff looks forward to 2000 in the Farmington community.

As people who work in the community and who spend countless hours covering continuing issues and the people who bring them to the forefront, we have some hopes for the coming year.

In Farmington:

The past year brought a significant change in downtown with the city's purchase of the historic and popular Civic Theatre. This weekend marks the grand re-opening of the theater that we are hoping the city continues to nurture.

The Civic can and should serve as an anchor for a successful downtown of retail and entertainment opportunities. It will take everyone's efforts – the public, businesses, Chamber of Commerce and of course, the Civic's owners, the city.

Downtown Farmington still needs a grocery store to serve residents, including great numbers of senior citizens, who live close by. The closing of Farmer Jack in the Downtown Farmington Center was a loss to the community. Damman Hardware is expected to move into the vacant building. But we still need a grocery store and hope that city officials and the Downtown Development Authority continue to search for one.

In Farmington Hills:

No issue more irritates and aggravates the affected public than the power outages that have plagued the city for years. While city officials have brought in Detroit Edison leaders for discussions and to meet with the public, residents would be hard pressed to say things have gotten better.

We expect Mayor Nancy Bates and the newly seated city council to take Edison by the horns yet again and insist on action to help the city's residents, some who suffer without power for days on end, losing hundreds of dollars in food from refrigerators. Some residents even have to move into motels.

Before we blink again spring and summer will arrive and most likely so will flooding problems for some neighborhoods in Farmington Hills.

ton Hills.

Now involved a lawsuit brought by some residents, city officials will say little on this issue. But flooding is as synonymous with Farmington Hills as are the continuing problems with power outages.

City officials must make these two issues priorities in the coming year. For some residents, it's just not fun living in this city.

City officials are to be congratulated for their efforts in the past year to fight attempts in the state Legislature to restrict home rule. With the current legislators, home rule will not be treated any differently in 2000. City officials should keep up the good work and continue to fight to preserve local government.

In the Farmington Public Schools:

How nice it would be if many more students – with parental encouragement – took the high school MEAP test. It would serve as yet another indicator for school officials on how well students are learning and how well teachers are teaching. We certainly understand a student's apprehension at taking yet another test. But being tested in one way or another is a way of life, especially once students get into the work world.

All eyes will be on Harrison High School in the 2000-2001 academic year as block scheduling becomes the norm. We urge parents, students and teachers to work together to make the transition as smooth as possible. Nothing can happen in the schools without parental support. And parents must remember that their children are much more resilient than they are. Undoubtedly there will be some rough spots, but cooperation will go a long way in resolving whatever problems arise.

The Farmington community is one in which the public likes to be involved. And that includes attending public meetings, such as the school board. But sometimes it's just plain tough to hear what is being said. We ask the school board and administrators to consider the public and install microphones – not for cable TV – but so the audience can hear what is being discussed.

A new year is always full of promise. But it takes everyone – residents, elected officials, public administrators, business leaders – to make a community healthy and a good place to live and work.

Make urban sprawl top issue

As the new year begins, we wondered what our communities might ask for if they were to compile a wish list of their wants and needs from Gov. John Engler and the Michigan House and Senate.

It seems to us such a list would surely include:

■ A new road funding formula.

Public Act 51 – the state law that determines how state gas tax money as well as other transportation revenues are to be divided between the state government, counties and municipalities – is set to expire in the fall of 2000. Lawmakers put that sunset on the formula specifically to force a review and revision of the distribution. And, of course, a nine-member study committee has already been working on a rewrite.

But as things stand, the process appears heavily weighted in favor of the Michigan Department of Transportation. If the MDOT, as a road agency, benefits from the revision, it will come at the expense of county road commissions, cities and townships.

Controversy over the way Act 51 distributes the money has been one of the major obstacles to Michigan's road improvement and upkeep. Out of anger that the formula unfairly redistributes road funding to outstate communities and turns the vast majority over to the MDOT, suburban municipalities have blocked attempts at increased gas taxes. As a state we've been unable to get to the issue of whether road funding is adequate, whether taxes to support roads are set at appropriate levels, because it makes little sense for suburbs to support any increase. Even at an increased level, Act 51 would send the money elsewhere.

No one argues that MDOT should get a lion's share of the money, because it is responsible for maintaining some of the state's most heavily traveled roads, expressways included. But when county road commissions are chronically underfunded and municipalities repeatedly have to take over upkeep of their own county and state roads, it is clear the formula is lopsided.

One idea proposed in Lansing would clearly

help – splitting the MDOT. A state road agency responsible for its own projects and maintenance programs should not be responsible for distributing the cash to municipalities and reviewing road funding requests. Obviously, when there is a conflict, MDOT will favor its own projects. Separate the "pass through" function of the MDOT from the road improvement and maintenance function. Then let the MDOT compete on an equal footing with counties and municipalities when it seeks additional road bucks. Then it would be clear that distribution of road funding would be based on the merits of the projects.

■ A coherent policy on education.

Gov. Engler and the Michigan Republicans have been working on education over the past year. Unfortunately, many of the policies enacted run counter to the state Constitution. That document clearly gives the authority for K-12 education in Michigan to the State Board of Education, but Engler and the GOP have moved as much responsibility away from the board as they can.

Republicans have also pushed for new schools known as "charter schools" or "public school academies." Although the claim is that they are simply independent public schools, they've been allowed to operate just as private schools do, with little reporting about their finances and little accountability.

If the Republicans intend to revamp Michigan's education system, a constitutional amendment is in order, outlining what that new system should be. Then voters can make the determination.

■ A new urban sprawl policy.

State lawmakers have been working to devise ways to address the issue of urban sprawl, using incentives rather than mandates to gain cooperation from local units of government to participate in regional planning.

With Michigan's economy booming and the state expecting a significant increase in population in the next 10 years, addressing the sprawl issue should be considered a top priority for state government.

GEORGE BROOKS



LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homedcomm.net

It's home rule

I received in the mail a sort of apology and excuse for his support for HB 4777 from 67th District State Rep. Raczkowski.

He still does not understand that in a democracy the people like to decide local issues for themselves. This is called home rule. Living wage ordinances apply only to contractors working on local government operations. If the local government wants to increase the cost of getting a job done by requiring its contractors to pay a living wage, why should it not do so? The employees who are paid a living wage are likely more productive and secure members of their community than a family living below the poverty line. It would seem that the only beneficiary of a living wage ban would be the contractor and possibly this state representative who was paid a campaign contribution.

I seem to recall another mailing from my state representative wherein he promised to protect the rights of voters and corporations. In my examination of the state and federal Constitutions, I do not find that corporations have many rights except to own property. And this right is regulated as it should be. The right of the local community to decide how to reward the people who do the work of the local community should not be denied.

William Hatton
Farmington Hills

Stop by sometime

Have you seen the Farmington library recently? Just this year, it was remodeled. I think it looks great and will be better for Farmington.

They added new computers for anyone to search the Web or type. The last time I went to the library, all the computers were being used. The adult section looks more organized. They put an information desk in the center of the room. It's really big and really helpful.

The children's section has a totally new theme. They added imitation trees which come

out from the ceiling. It looks really neat. When I was there, the children seemed to enjoy it.

In my opinion, the library is great and good for our community. I hope all of you can visit it sometime and see what I mean.

Lisa Hellebuyck
Power Middle School

Something's wrong

I read Kathie O'Donohue's article "True spirit of Christmas must endure" of Dec. 23 with great interest. What she says is so true. The real meaning of Christmas is surely being wrong out in the homogenization process of the lumping of other faiths and cultures into the same mix. It does not do justice to any of them.

What is also lost is the fact that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of a unique person. It is not just some generic event. Our very calendar shows what a profound influence the birth of Christ has had on this old planet Earth. We record the passing of time based on his birth. Yet today we treat his life as just a ho-hum thing.

Some of the greatest music is Christmas music. What can compare with Handel's Messiah, or any of the other religious Christmas carols? Yet we can't use this fine music in our politically correct public schools. Some of the greatest paintings have been inspired by the Christmas message. They have filled our finest museums around the world with incomparable examples, but nativity scenes are verboten in the public square as Ms. O'Donohue says. The list of similar works would be endless, yet today's society wants to deny the Christian community their opportunity to honor the birth of Christ in a meaningful way. There is something wrong with this picture.

I appreciate Ms. O'Donohue's article.

Thanks for publishing it.

Henry Grysh

Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 249-477-5450, jmaliszewski@oe.homedcomm.net
FRANK DALLAGHER, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149, fdallagher@oe.homedcomm.net
PEL KNOXWELL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177, pknoxwell@oe.homedcomm.net
SUSAN ROSEN, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100, srosen@oe.homedcomm.net
BLANK DINKSON, GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252, bdkinson@oe.homedcomm.net
MARK WARREN, CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, 734-953-2117, mwarren@oe.homedcomm.net
RICK FIORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150, rfior@oe.homedcomm.net

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— Philip Power